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For more information contact:

Kristie Young, Media Relations Coordinator
(409) 833-3663

**The “Gift of Life” “Spirit of Love” Award Presented to
Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist**

The **Julie Rogers “Gift of Life” Program** posthumously recognized the mother of Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist **Leonard Pitts, Jr.**, by honoring her with its prestigious “**Spirit of Love**” award. Agnes Pitts was only 62 years old when she died of breast cancer 16 years ago.

Pitts was visibly moved when he received the plaque that was inscribed with the phrase, “A woman whose spirit still soars through her inspiring story of dedication, strength, determination, and courage.” Sponsored by **Lamar University** and co-sponsored by the **Beaumont Enterprise** and “**Gift of Life**” Program, Pitts spoke at a public lecture at the **University Theatre of Lamar University, September 13.**

Pitts referred to his mother as “Wonderwoman and the greatest woman I have ever known.” He credits her with encouraging his talent at an early age, despite financial setbacks and a difficult home environment. When he was 8, she bought him a toy typewriter, and when he was 14, she helped him buy a real typewriter on layaway. This year, Pitts received the Pulitzer Prize for commentary.

“Gift of Life” President **Nell McCallum Morris** presented the award to Pitts and also a \$2,500 personal contribution from “Gift of Life” Chair, **Regina Rogers**, to the American Cancer Society in Pitts’ name on behalf of the “Gift of Life” Program.

Pitts has a syndicated column of commentary on pop culture, social issues and family life that runs weekly in the *Beaumont Enterprise*. His most recent book, “Becoming Dad: Black Men and the Journey to Fatherhood,” was released in May 1999. Honored by numerous organizations, Pitts’ journalistic career includes writing pop music reviews for the Miami Herald to scripts for “Casey’s Top 40 Countdown with Casey Kasem.” On September 11, he wrote an open letter to terrorists, called “We’ll Go Forward From This Moment.” It generated more than 30,000 emails, and because of its popularity, the letter has been reprinted on posters, read on television and quoted by U.S. Representative Richard Gephardt as part of the Democratic Party’s weekly radio address.

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As **one of the largest cancer screening initiatives of its type in the state**, the "Gift of Life" serves more than **5,000** recipients annually. In addition to approximately **350** prostate cancer screenings conducted each year, with follow-up care available at UTMB Galveston, several thousand individuals are provided cancer awareness education and information at more than **50** "Gift of Life" Sidney 'Chief' Dauphin outreach programs and area health fairs; over **850** medically underserved women receive free mammograms at Memorial Hermann Baptist Hospitals in Beaumont and Orange; and an additional **750** women are provided free mammograms and clinical breast exams on the UTMB mobile van at strategic locations throughout Southeast Texas twenty times each year. Further, the "Gift of Life" minivan is available for clients who require transportation services to and from the program's cancer screening tests and exams.

A cooperative effort of Memorial Hermann Baptist Hospitals, the Julie and Ben Rogers Cancer Institute, the University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB) at Galveston and its local clinics, the UTMB Cancer Stop Program, The University of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center and local physicians, the "Gift of Life" has funded over **8,000** free mammograms and **2,800** free prostate cancer screenings, and has conducted more than **225** educational outreach programs since its inception.